

UNLEARNING BIAS: EFFECTS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION ON RACIAL BIAS

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In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
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Master of Arts

In

Education: Equity and Social Justice in Education

by

Cherise Marie Kadrmas

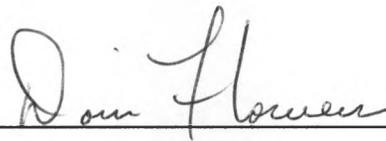
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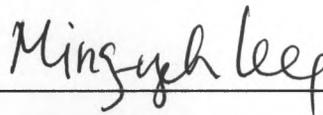
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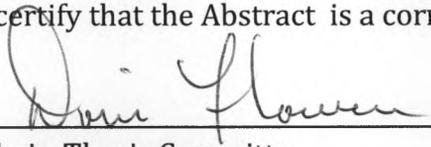
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# UNLEARNING BIAS: EFFECTS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION ON RACIAL BIAS

Cherise Marie Kadrmas  
San Francisco, California  
2017

Since the power structure that enforces racial oppression has been in place since the founding of this country, and some of the greatest perpetrators of the power structure are unsuspecting white people who do not even realize that they have been indoctrinated to believe that people of other races are inferior and perpetuate oppression. One possible way to break that cycle is to enlighten young members of white society about the realities of power and oppression so they do not carry it with them into their eventual places in society, some of which will be positions of power. This case study uses interview and survey data to provide preliminary empirical evidence on whether that is actually a possibility, and finds that an exposure to an ethnic studies curriculum increases awareness of white privilege and decreases bias. Further research can be conducted regarding the outcomes of students of color given this information, the outcomes of white students in a diverse community, the social effects of such curricula, and other areas.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

  
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Chair, Thesis Committee

12/18/2017  
Date

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## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

Multicultural and culturally relevant education are largely talked about in the context of their benefits for students of color specifically because of the way they have been left out of the education system since its inception. While that is absolutely essential, there is another piece that is not discussed as much, and that is to accordingly educate white students who otherwise will perpetuate the institutions and acts of racism against students of color, many of whom will be the future educators of children of color and holders of power making decisions about the lives of people of color. It is impossible to discount the effects the power structure that exists in America has had on that system of education. After all, to remain in power, one needs to have others beneath them, and the “white” dominant culture has done whatever it takes to remain in power, mostly by making sure that other groups remain subordinate. That power is demonstrated in every facet of life in America, not the least of which being education. Structured schooling in America was never designed to include children of color, and, despite reform after reform over the decades, it has not changed enough to truly include children of color to this

day. One reason for that is, even with school integration resulting from *Brown v. Board of Education* and the subsequent attempts to make school more inclusive for children of color, the curriculum has not changed. The curriculum that was designed for white children, that was designed to reinforce white people's superiority, that is taught entirely from the Eurocentric perspective of those in power, has not changed. This Eurocentric curriculum that has been in place for so long serves to leave children of color out of the learning process by ignoring any ways of learning that differ from the "norm," leaving out important parts of history that include other ethnic groups, and concentrating only on the dominant culture. All of these things also have a detrimental effect on students from the dominant group, as they are not given the chance to learn about or value the other cultures around them, and they are propped up with false superiority backed by inaccurate historical context. Further, as Freire (1972) noted, oppression has a dehumanizing effect on both the oppressed and the oppressor: "No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (p. 85). Because of that, I am also interested in the benefits of a multicultural curriculum for white students in general, and to investigate those benefits in terms of whether white students who learn in an equitable environment with a culturally relevant curriculum have fewer biases and ingrained racist attitudes than those in traditional Eurocentric environments.

It should be noted that the use of the terms, “non-white” and “other groups” are used intentionally throughout this narrative to convey the false white/other dichotomy that is at the heart of this problem.

### **Self-Reflection**

My interest in this topic stems from my own schooling experience. I grew up in North Dakota, a state which, around the time of my graduation from high school, was 94 percent white, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001). When the oil boom hit, there was an influx of people coming to work in the oil fields, and the demographics shifted slightly, though they remain largely the same. As of the 2015 census, the state was 87 percent white, 5.5 percent American Indian/Alaska Native, 3.5 percent Hispanic, 2 percent black, 2 percent two or more races, and 1.5 percent Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The schools I attended were attended by almost exclusively white kids. According to data based on the 2013–2014 school year from *U.S. News and World Report*, the high school in which I matriculated is attended by 91 percent white students, 5 percent Hispanic students, and 1 percent each AI/AN, Asian, and black students, and students of two or more races. That means that, of the 829 total students, there are 41 Hispanic students and 8 students from each of the other non-white racial groups. Though I do not have data from 1999–2003, when I was attending, my memory and a scan of my yearbooks tell me that those numbers were closer to one or two students from each minority group. Though there is a

substantial Native American population in the state, they were sequestered on reservations and did not attend “our” schools. I did not meet a black person until junior high school, where there was one black student, who remained to sole black student in my age group through high school. With these demographics, it might not, at first glance, seem harmful to use a Eurocentric curriculum, but, in the following pages, I will explore the detrimental effects on students of all demographics.

### **The Classroom in Monochrome**

With very little diversity in the student bodies of my K-12 schools, the teacher diversity was even lower. All of my teachers, through all of my 13 years, were white. This exemplifies the “figurative presence of racism,” or what Rosenberg refers to as “the presence of an absence” (as cited in Cochran-Smith, 2000, p. 168). Students at my school did not have the benefit of seeing a person of authority or role model from any race other than white. They did not have the opportunity to learn from the personal experience of somebody from a different culture, and even second-person narratives about experiences of people from other cultures were largely absent since they were not relevant to the curriculum, or, presumably, to the mostly white students. However, had they been present, they would not have been as valuable as if they had been shared by the those who experienced them, as they would not have reflected the true nature of those experiences. After all, as was pointed out by Vanstory, a white person’s perspective and reality does not

necessarily reflect those of the person whose story is being told (Cochran-Smith, 2000, p. 173). It is incredibly valuable in an increasingly diverse nation for students to be exposed to the perspectives of those different from themselves. It prepares them to navigate higher education institutions, workplaces, and social settings where they are not surrounded by only white people. It also helps them to develop empathy for other human beings, which is a life skill that proves valuable in almost every setting and situation. It is also essential in restoring the humanity of both marginalized groups (the oppressed) and the dominant group (the oppressor) (Freire, 1972).

### **This Curriculum is My Curriculum**

In addition to a lack of diversity in the classroom, students in my school, and in schools all over the nation, are treated to a lack of diversity within the curriculum. At their inception, schools were designated for only white children. As children from different ethnicities began integrating schools, however, the methods designed to help white children succeed remained in place without the addition of methods designed to help children from marginalized groups succeed and with the addition of some methods that served to further push out those children. The inception of standardized tests is one of those methods.

The curriculum that was in place when I attended school is still largely the same. Students are taught that the Western Scientific Method is the correct—and

only—way to conduct scientific experiments. It leaves out methods that are proven effective and valued by other cultures, which some students may even better understand. It also leaves out the opportunity for students to demonstrate creative learning through inductive reasoning by coming up with their own methods for experimentation. Similarly, students are taught one way to complete math problems rather than including methods that are valued in other cultures or other ways of understanding. Most obviously, though, history is taught entirely from a Eurocentric perspective that ignores and devalues the contributions of other groups entirely. Through that lens, white children are covertly taught that they are superior to other races. At the same time, non-white children are covertly taught that they are inferior to whites. Overtly, they are taught a white version of history, in which non-white groups are almost always portrayed as either the enemy or supporting characters to the white protagonists. This limited narrative is further supported by the media. In this version, white students are not exposed to the true, rich histories of peoples around the world or in the United States, and they are robbed of the chance to learn about the valuable contributions of peoples of color in creating our nation and its history, as well as the atrocities against them that served as the foundation for our collective dehumanization. This, at best, leaves children with a gap in their knowledge of the true history of the United States and the people within it that they must work to rectify in order to live and work in harmony within a diverse society.

Cochran-Smith (2000) demonstrates this as her teacher education students realize that they have been miseducated when they look at the way textbooks treat labor history and realize that they know nothing about the struggles of the working class for justice (p. 141). At worst, it gives students a false sense of superiority, which they carry with them into their positions of power in government, business, and schools and other community institutions, where they serve to perpetuate the systems of oppression that are in place.

### **Discrimination as an Abstract Idea**

The lack of diversity in my school district brought with it a perceived lack of difference and a lack of awareness about oppression. As an adult, oppression is a topic that I have come to learn much about, but it is not something that I was really aware of before leaving North Dakota because it was not discussed in any way, and it is not something I experienced or even witnessed. But for my entire life, there has been a litany of events happening throughout the nation that could have been the basis of a rich discussion between teacher and students around the topic of oppression. These discussions were not had in my school, though, probably because the teachers and administration did not see them as relevant to us. But they would have been mistaken. Oppression is relevant to everybody, as it dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1972). Even if it is not directly experienced, it affects everyone in one way or another, whether it is a white student internalizing

their covertly taught white superiority to disregard the oppression of others and perpetuate white supremacy, a white student desiring to be a part of the change but not being armed with a base knowledge of the true state of our racial divide and how to navigate that, one of few students of color having to form an identity within a community that overtly and/or covertly participates in their oppression, or an entire nation of people that is starkly divided by racial tension and government-sanctioned oppression. It also breeds what King (1991) refers to as dysconscious racism, “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (p. 135). Students in my school were exposed only to the dominant culture, and we were not encouraged to think about how the systems of power work in our favor but against other groups. As a result, one of two things happened as we became adults: Some students began the long and confusing process of unlearning this racism in order to become part of the solution, while others embraced and/or internalized it to perpetuate the racist attitudes and white power structures that they had always known.

### **My Purpose**

Personally, I experienced a little bit of both of those effects. As previously mentioned, during my formative years, I did not learn anything of import about people different from me, not even about the Native Americans who lived all around us, but who we never saw or even talked about unless it was to disparage them. I

unquestioningly absorbed the white superiority myth that was stealthily woven into everything I learned. I took that with me into adulthood, and, along with it, the implicit and explicit biases that resulted. And because I never saw a reason to address it, because I did not see that there was anything to be addressed, it took me far longer than I would like to admit to begin the unlearning process.

Even after I joined the Army and found myself exposed to a lot more people of color, I still did not recognize it. Instead, I thought that knowing people of color could somehow prove that I was not a racist. While living in Savannah, Georgia, in the mid-2000s, I blamed the severe racial tension I saw on the black community there because, from my perspective—the perspective of a person who had no previous experience with oppression—it appeared as though they were not welcoming to me or other white people. At that time, it did not occur to me that their attitudes toward white people could be a reaction to the maltreatment they had been experiencing from white people and society for their entire lives. Shortly after that when I was looking for my first house, I remember looking at neighborhood demographics and thinking those with higher white percentages were probably safer. When I returned to college after separating from the Army to get my bachelor's degree, I looked with interest at the ethnic studies classes that were offered, but ultimately decided not to enroll in any of those classes because I thought they were not “for” me. During that time, I also wrote an op-ed piece for my college newspaper

outlining why I thought affirmative action was discriminatory toward white students. When the campus diversity officer sat me down to discuss the piece and offer me a little education on the matter, I chose not to hear him because my lack of understanding and narrow perspective prevented me. However, even though the conversation did not immediately awaken me, I believe it was the conversation that initiated my journey to awareness.

What truly opened my eyes, though, was my first job after graduating. That job was at a magazine titled *Diverse Issues In Higher Education*, which is a black-owned publication specifically covering issues faced by and policies affecting students and educators of color and other minority groups in a higher-education setting. It was this exposure to the realities of oppression faced by students and faculty of color and to the contributions and achievements of people of color to education and society, as well as daily interaction with black coworkers in a majority-black setting that made me realize how little I knew about other people and cultures and how complicit I have been in perpetuating racism throughout my entire life.

It is for this reason I am undertaking this research. In my experience, an exposure to literature and subjects by and about people of color, focusing on their own achievements and experiences, was the undeniable catalyst to my ongoing awakening. Not only was the material covered in the magazine enlightening for me,

but the immersive experience where I did not have the “safety net” of being surrounded by mostly other white people made me more apt to listen, and the material had a chance to sink in. While it is true that an awakening occurred for me, and I have continued to educate myself in this area, I still cannot claim to be truly “woke.” While I know my intentions are good and I am committed to growing in this area, I still make mistakes, so I am constantly looking inward and reflecting on my thoughts, words, and actions in order to continue to grow and reduce my impact as a perpetuator of systemic oppression.

### **Research Questions**

I believe that a little knowledge can go a long way. While recent events in America demonstrate that there are still a good number of active white supremacist extremists, I truly believe that there are enough good-intentioned and unintentional racists out there that an education that fosters an understanding of white privilege and racial bias can make a huge difference in disrupting the status quo. Therefore, my research questions, how does a multicultural curriculum affect white students’ understanding of white privilege and racial bias, does it reduce explicit and implicit bias, and does a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias motivate white students to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color, seek to discover whether I am an outlier, or if

multicultural and culturally relevant curricula are equally beneficial to all white students in a society striving for equity in diversity.

### **Justification**

Most of the research on benefits of multicultural education and improving outcomes of students of color/reducing the achievement gap revolve around interventions aimed specifically at students of color, such as including culturally relevant or similar pedagogy, investing more in schools serving youth of color, and developing programs aimed at tutoring or mentoring youth of color. While these approaches are essential, there does not exist a large body of work exploring solutions that attack the root of the problem, which I think is equally essential. The power structure that enforces racial oppression has been in place since the founding of this country, and some of the greatest perpetrators of the power structure are unsuspecting white people who do not even realize that they have been indoctrinated to believe that people of other races are inferior and that they perpetuate oppression. I think that one possible way to break that cycle is to enlighten young, white members of society about the realities of power and oppression so they do not carry it with them into their eventual places in society, some of which will be positions of power. My research provides preliminary empirical evidence on whether that is actually a possibility, and further research can be conducted regarding the outcomes of students of color given this information, the

outcomes of white students in a diverse community, the social effects of such curricula, and other areas. This area of research is essential to fill in the gap in the existing research that discusses the other side of oppression—the oppressors.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

Most of the current literature on benefits of multicultural education and improving outcomes of students of color/reducing the achievement gap revolve around interventions to help students of color within the existing system. There is not much literature on how to ameliorate the situation on the side of the dominant culture, and I think both things need to be happening concurrently to truly improve the situation. The available research shows that, while recognizing white privilege is essential as a first step, it should not be the focus when educating whites on diversity. Instead, education should be focused on white supremacy and the meaning of whiteness. Taking a diversity-focused course, especially when combined with contact with people of color and positive framing, shows promise toward reducing bias in white students.

Dee and Penner (2016) conducted a study in SFUSD that shows that taking ethnic studies has long-term, positive effects for students of color, including decreasing absences, increasing GPA, and increasing overall credits earned. Conversely, the body of literature discussing methods of reducing bias tends to

focus on the individual, suggesting actions that the individual person can take to reduce their own biases. McIntosh's 1988 essay on white privilege told people to "unpack the invisible knapsack" and listed 26 indicators of white privilege that people are supposed to pay attention to within themselves in order to try to lessen the oppressive effects of their privilege on people of color. Though it was written nearly 30 years ago, it is still often the seminal document that teacher educators turn to when talking about effectively teaching in diverse classrooms, according to Lensmire et al. (2013), and has led to the idea of "white privilege pedagogy," which has been discussed by scholars including Margolin (2015) and Rainer (2015). Lensmire et al. argued that, while important, identifying one's own white privilege is not enough to end the cycle of systemic racism in this country. Instead, antiracist education needs to focus more on white supremacy and also on what it actually means to be white. Boatright-Horowitz, Marraccini, and Harps-Logan (2012) looked at the emotional reactions of white students to learning about white privilege, while King (1991) looked at the effects of dysconscious racism on white students' views on social inequity.

Current studies on institutional methods of reducing bias are also limited. However, Aberson, Shoemaker, and Tomolillo (2004) showed that contact has a positive impact on implicit bias. In their study, they found that white participants with black and Latino friends exhibit less implicit bias than those without black and

Latino friends. But Jayakumar (2015) showed that contact is not enough if students come from segregated areas, as those students had higher colorblind orientations, even when attending a diverse institution. However, those who attended institutions that successfully fostered a positive racial climate were less likely to maintain colorblind orientations in their post-college years. Chang (2002) examined the effect of fulfilling a college diversity course requirement on the prejudicial attitudes of students. The results showed a significant difference in levels of prejudice toward African Americans prior to starting the class and following completion. Denson (2009) found that curricular and cocurricular diversity activities have an overall positive effect on reducing racial bias. Finally, Sparks and Ledgerwood (2017) conducted a series of studies examining how we frame our perceptions of what we see and feel, and they found that people react more favorably when new information is framed in a positive way versus a negative way. Further, people tend to get stuck on a negative framework when they see a potential loss. So, if something was initially framed in a negative way and the participant reacted negatively, but then it was switched and framed in a positive way, participants still reacted negatively toward it.

The sources are organized in a linear fashion, starting with explanatory material and ending with more solution-based studies. The review starts with McIntosh's (1988) article to explain more about what white privilege can be,

followed by King's (1992) article examining students' views on social inequity. Then it moves to some of the problems presented by that vein of thinking with Lensmire et al. (2013), Margolin (2015), Rainer (2015), and Boatright-Horowitz et al., (2012), followed by more solutions-based take on white privilege. Jayakumar (2015) examines diversity initiatives and colorblind ideologies, Abernethy et al. (2004) offer an exploration of unlearning, and Chang (2002) looks at reducing prejudice through diversity training. Denson (2009) examines diversity-related initiatives and racial bias outcomes, and Sparks and Ledgerwood (2017) consider framing. Finally, it looks at the effects shown by Dee and Penner (2016) of ethnic studies on students of color.

### **Theories of Whiteness**

First, McIntosh (1988) unpacked the meaning of white privilege. She explained that racism has been taught as a thing that disadvantages certain groups of people, and that many people think of racism as "individual acts of meanness" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 5). However, she explained, racism can also be seen in the advantages gained by people from the dominant group, which are conferred on them by the systems of power. She contended that the first step in dismantling these systems is to acknowledge the advantages gained because of such systems, and then work to lessen their effects. She compiled a list of 26 indications of privilege that she recognized from her daily life, including, "I can turn on the television or open to the

front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented. ... I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race. ... I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race. ... I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider. ... If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race" (McIntosh, 1988, pp. 2-3). The list can also be used by other white people to acknowledge and be aware of their unearned privileges in order to mitigate their effects. She made clear that what she calls privilege in this context is specifically referring to those things that are unearned but provide an advantage, or confer dominance, anyway. While she acknowledged that confronting privilege on an individual level is not really effective in dismantling the power structures that created white privilege, she contended that making the unseen seen is the first step in initiating that process.

King (1991) looked at the effects of dysconscious racism, "a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges" (p. 135) on white students' views on social inequity. She administered an open-ended survey to her teacher education students, "most of whom come from relatively privileged, monocultural backgrounds" (p. 133), across two semesters in her Social Foundations course at a Jesuit university. King found that their understanding of

racial inequality was extremely limited. Most answers linked racial inequality to either slavery or lack of equal opportunity for black people, and many of those cited cultural deficits resulting from those factors as a major contributing factor to racial inequality. Of the 57 respondents, only one connected racial inequality to structural factors. The majority of responses both defended white privilege while also devaluing African American cultural heritage and diversity. Students failed to recognize how opportunity is largely dependent on assimilation, the structural racism in place that originally justified slavery, and the innumerable ways that white people have benefited from that structural racism and the effects of slavery. Because of that, students need to be taught to think critically and consciously recognize their white privilege and dysconscious racism. "Students need experiential opportunities to recognize and evaluate the ideological influences that shape their thinking about schooling, society, themselves, and diverse others" (King, 1992, p. 143).

Lensmire et al. (2013) cautioned against taking McIntosh's work as pure fact. Using narrative research, the authors shared the experiences of two members of the Midwest Critical Whiteness Collective in order to examine the ways that white privilege pedagogy impairs the abilities of white educators to truly confront racism. The first story is "Jessie's Story," in which Jessie takes part in a professional development program, hoping to learn how to make her classroom more inclusive and culturally relevant.

In Jessie's story, she recounts the sharing in the group of an event that deeply affected her, in which a black man approached her car to ask for money to help with car trouble. She was initially frightened by a black man approaching her car, but then was struck by the realization that she had never found herself in the position to need to ask for money by the side of the road, which moved her to tears. She also talked about the group sharing their privileges according to McIntosh's list of indications of privilege. Though she felt good sharing, Jessie questioned whether she was really heard or understood, and whether the recognition of these privileges really changed anything.

In "Mary's Story," Mary recounted her experiences teaching the multicultural education class for teacher credential students at a predominantly white university in the Midwest. She discussed how most students provided positive feedback to McIntosh's article, many calling it "eye-opening," which made her feel like she was doing a great job. However, a few students, one named John in particular, provided negative feedback to being asked to identify privilege, or, as he saw it, being asked to feel guilty for being white and male. While John showed growth in other ways in the class, he continued to push back on McIntosh's article throughout the class, causing Mary to question whether subscribing to McIntosh's guidelines on white privilege is really a convincing determinant on whether a person is racist.

Lensmire et al. (2013) found through these two stories that confession of

white privilege is not enough. Jessie's story showed that, while confession of white privilege can be cathartic, it is often left at that and, therefore, does nothing to actually ameliorate the problem. Instead, it needs to be looked at in the context of the social, economic, and political systems in which it was created, exists, and thrives.

While we certainly cannot pretend that white privilege is not a part of this system, addressing it alone and as the property of individual white people without an understanding of *why* it exists will not allow us to dismantle the systemic aspects of racism and reshape individual relations." (Lensmire et al., 2013, p. 421)

Conversely, Mary's story shows how we erroneously use such confession to determine who the "good," antiracist white people are. However, the researchers discovered through Mary's story, particularly considering the fact that confession means nothing without action, that there are other methods of encouraging students to develop an understanding of racism and prejudice than confession of privilege. Additionally, by assuming that all white students will be able to identify with the white privilege checklist, McIntosh's article essentializes the racial identities of white people, when they also come from myriad perspectives. It is important to take individual experiences into account when dealing with any person, and to account for intersectionality in antiracist work.

The study indicates how confession of privilege does nothing to solve the

problem but merely acts as a stand-in for the work that needs to be done to fight against racism by oversimplifying white privilege to the point that it is dangerous. It further emphasizes that the focus should be removed from white privilege and placed on white supremacy and action steps for dismantling white supremacy.

Margolin (2015) used Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion, which looks for the hidden or repressed meanings in texts, to refute McIntosh's conclusions. He asked the question, "Why would whites want to open their eyes only to learn that the system had been rigged in their favor?" to form the hypothesis, "What whites gain from confessing and renouncing their privileges, the benefit they receive from participating in white privilege classes, seminars, and workshops, is a new set of misrepresentations, evasions, and self-deceptions" (Margolin, 2015, p. 4).

He found that simply acknowledging white privilege does nothing to mitigate its effects, and actually has the more detrimental effect of perpetuating white privilege. White privilege pedagogy effectively continues to silence the voices of people of color, who are unable to identify with and contribute to conversations based solely on white privilege, by focusing on the experiences and feelings of only white people. Further, he found that many of the privileges listed were not really privileges at all, but basic human rights that should be the norm for anybody living in a just society, such as a safe and habitable living environment. However, instead of focusing on extending those things that should simply be considered normal to

those that tend not to have access to them, white privilege pedagogy focuses instead on providing white people who enjoy them a platform for confession in order to ameliorate their guilt. He also found that white privilege pedagogy extends racist structures. By focusing on the individual—the white individual—white privilege pedagogy places white people at a higher level of importance than people of color. He contended that it continues to put the spotlight on white people’s feelings and has a tendency to make them feel more complacent about their privilege and more comfortable in their whiteness. It tends to make white people feel that they are doing something about it by simply acknowledging that it exists, and also tends to make them feel like the acknowledgement exonerates them from any guilt (Margolin, 2015).

Rainer (2015) focused on the use of experiential education and a white privilege pedagogy that is aimed at encouraging white students to recognize their privilege and the power structures that feed it as a way to disrupt the status quo of discriminatory policies and practices. He used personal narrative to explore the motivations for and benefits from white privilege. He looked at specifically focusing on white students while putting them in multicultural settings where they will have contact with people from non-dominant groups. He used his experiences as a white male growing up in the South during the Civil Rights era and beyond to demonstrate the difficulties, even for a fellow white person in many instances, in being able to

convey the meaning of white privilege to many white people. He found that it is important for white people to learn through experience, known as experiential education. He also found that a multicultural curriculum is beneficial in helping to expose the realities of white privilege to those who enjoy it, as it offers perspectives other than the white perspective through which to view experience. He did recognize his limitations as a white man to fully appreciate or be able to articulate the realities of white privilege or lack thereof, but stressed the importance of multicultural education courses being taught by people of color rather than white people, as a white person cannot accurately reflect the experience of a person of color.

Boatright-Horowitz et al. (2012) looked at the emotional reactions of white students to learning about white privilege. They used a mixed-methods design to analyze student responses to a survey assessing their cognitive and emotional reactions to the antiracism module of their General Psychology course. The participants consisted of 674 students enrolled in the course at a Northeastern university, of whom, 87 were students of color and 400 were white students. The results showed that white students showed high levels of discomfort while learning about white privilege, as though they were the “bad guys,” and that the students who revealed those emotions were also less likely to understand the concept of white privilege. Those who were more likely to identify white privilege as a societal

issue, however, were more likely to understand the concept overall. Results also showed high levels of shock, demonstrating that white privilege had not been covered in the early educations of these students.

### **Examinations of Bias-Targeted Actions**

Moving away from the focus on white privilege, the literature begins to look at diversity initiatives and their effects on racial bias. The largest body of work in this area was written in the 1990s and early 2000s. Most of this research has shown that these initiatives have positive effects on racial bias (Antony, 1995; Astin, 1993a, 1993b; Engberg, 2004; Gudeman, 2000; Katz & Ivey, 1977; MacPhee, Kreutzer, & Fritz, 1994; Marin, 2000; Maruyama & Moreno, 2000; Milem, 1994; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Springer, Palmer, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). A few studies have demonstrated nonsignificant effects of diversity initiatives on racial bias (Brehm, 1998; Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000; Neville & Furlong, 1994), and even fewer studies have shown mixed effects (Bidell, Lee, Bouchie, Ward, & Brass, 1994; Gurin et al., 2002).

Jayakumar (2015) examined the relationships between pre-college residential segregation, diversity initiatives in college, and colorblind ideologies in adulthood. To answer the questions,

- How, if at all, is the racial diversity of the student body during one's college years related to white adults' postcollege colorblind ideological orientation?

Further, how is this relationship influenced by precollege residential segregation?

- How, if at all, do specific diversity experiences in college impact the postcollege colorblind ideological orientation of white adults? How is this relationship influenced by precollege residential segregation?
- To what extent does exposure to racial homogeneity during and after college (e.g., fraternity involvement, postcollege segregated lifestyle) impact the postcollege colorblind ideological orientation of white adults? And how is this relationship influenced by precollege residential segregation?

Jayakumar (2015) performed a quantitative analysis on a national longitudinal data set (p. 612). Using data from a study by the Higher Education Research Institute that surveyed the same participants over three time periods—in 1994, 1998, and 2004—the study analyzed “1) whites from segregated, predominantly white precollege neighborhoods, and 2) whites from racially diverse precollege neighborhoods” (p. 618). The sample was made up of 7,689 white students from 226 predominantly white institutions, 6,600 of whom lived in segregated neighborhoods before college, and 1,089 of whom lived in diverse neighborhoods. The results showed that students who occupied spaces of white racial isolation, such as neighborhoods, clubs, friend groups, and workplaces, had higher colorblind orientations, especially when those spaces accumulate over time, even when attending a diverse institution. However, those who attended institutions that successfully fostered a positive racial

climate were less likely to maintain colorblind orientations in their post-college years.

Aberson et al. (2004) stated that implicit and explicit racial bias is still prevalent in American society and schools and examined whether interethnic friendships have an impact on implicit and explicit racial biases. Based on Allport's 1954 Contact Hypothesis, which "specifies that contact with out-group members is beneficial to attitudes regarding the out-group when individuals have equal status, have common goals, are in a cooperative or interdependent setting, and have support from authorities" (p. 335), Aberson et al. (2004) used two studies to examine the effects of contact on racial bias.

In the first study, Aberson et al. (2004) started with the following two hypotheses: "Participants with African American friends exhibit less implicit pro-White bias than participants without African American friends," and, "Participants with African American friends exhibit less explicit pro-White bias than participants without African American friends" (p. 338). Participants included 94 undergraduate students from a public university, who were 83 percent women and an average of 22.2 years of age. Only data from the 70 white participants was used in the study. Participants took the Implicit Association Test, in which they were tested on how closely they associate white male names with either positive or negative nouns versus how closely they associate black male names with either positive or negative

nouns. Additionally, participants were given a questionnaire in which they indicated the number of their current self-defined close friendships with African Americans. They also completed four additional measures of explicit bias: the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, Hardee, & Balls, 1981), the Diversity Scale, and the Discrimination Scale (Willenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997), which were each scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale; and a semantic differential scale, in which participants mark from 1 (unfavorable) to 7 (favorable) on a broken line between a pair of words.

The results of this study showed that those participants with close African American friends demonstrated less implicit bias than those without, which is consistent with their first hypothesis. The results diverged from the second hypothesis, however, in showing that there was no significant difference between those with close African American friends and those without on the explicit measures.

The second study was nearly identical to the first, except that it looked at the relationship between contact and bias between white participants and Latinos, rather than African Americans. Aberson et al. (2004) again started with the following two hypotheses: "Participants with Latino friends exhibit less implicit pro-White bias than participants without Latino friends," and "Participants with Latino friends exhibit less explicit pro-White bias than participants without Latino friends" (p. 342). Participants in this study included 96 undergraduate students from a

public university, who were 74 percent women and an average of 22.1 years of age. Only data from the 78 white participants was used in the study.

Again, the results of this study showed that participants with close Latino friends demonstrated less implicit bias than those without. However, unlike in the first study, the results of this study showed slightly less explicit bias by those with close Latino friends than those without, though without much statistical significance.

Overall, Aberson et al. (2004) found that participants with African American or Latino friends showed less implicit racial bias than participants without such friends, but there was no significant difference in explicit bias between the two groups. This study provides empirical evidence on a method that might accomplish the goal of reducing bias.

Chang (2002) also emphasized the continued prevalence of racial prejudice in America, and looked at the effects of fulfilling a diversity requirement in college on that prejudice. To answer the question of “whether a required diversity-related course actually improved students’ racial attitudes” (Chang, 2002, p. 25), he administered an adaptation of the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) to two groups of students enrolled in a course fulfilling a diversity requirement. The study took place in the spring semester of 1999 at a northeastern public university with a diverse population of students that had had a diversity requirement in place for all

undergraduate students for seven years. The study used a between-subjects design, meaning that one group (pretreatment group) completed the MRS as they were just beginning their course while the other group (treatment group) completed it near the end of their course. The pretreatment group consisted of 112 participants taking a diversity requirement within the Political Science, American Studies, Women's Studies, Anthropology, and Sociology departments. The treatment group consisted of 81 participants taking a diversity requirement within the American Studies, English, Philosophy, and Sociology departments. The adapted MRS, which consisted of eight relevant items embedded in a larger questionnaire consisting of unrelated social and political questions in order to camouflage its true intent, was administered to each participant to assess their level of prejudice toward black people. The MRS was scored by taking an average of the response values of the eight items for each participant.

The study found that there was a substantive difference between the two groups, with those at the end of their diversity coursework showing more favorable views toward African Americans than those just beginning their diversity coursework. However, students who took additional diversity courses demonstrated no change in attitude toward African Americans between the beginning and the end of the coursework. Chang noted that this is likely due to self-selection, as additional diversity coursework is not a requirement and those who choose to take additional

diversity courses are likely more open to and interested in learning more about diversity.

Denson (2009) looked at the prior research to determine the relationship between diversity-related initiatives and racial bias outcomes. To determine that relationship, Denson (2009) asked the research questions,

Research Question 1: What is the magnitude of the general relationship between curricular and cocurricular diversity activities on racial bias (overall effect)?

Research Question 2: Is there heterogeneity? In other words, is there variation in the effect of curricular and cocurricular diversity activities on racial bias (heterogeneity in effect sizes)?

Research Question 3: If there is heterogeneity, why? The presence of heterogeneity provides an opportunity to investigate more closely the reasons for the observed differences. For example, which types of programs are most effective? For whom are the activities most effective? Which types of studies show the most effective programs (predicting effect sizes)? (p. 806)

To answer those questions, Denson conducted a meta-analysis of the existing research to summarize and integrate the findings of the existing research looking at curricular and/or cocurricular diversity activities and their relationship to racial bias outcomes. Terenzini et al. define curricular and cocurricular diversity activities as:

institutionally structured and purposeful programmatic efforts to help students engage in racial/ethnic and/or gender “diversity” in the form of both ideas and people. This category includes studies of the influences of coursework and the curriculum, and participation in racial or multicultural awareness workshops, as well as various other forms of institutional programming intended to enhance the diversity of a campus or the educational consequences of engaging “diversity” in one form or another. (as cited in Denson, 2009, pp. 811–812)

The study looked at 27 primary studies on the topic, 26 of which were published in the 1990s and early 2000s, and one that was published in 1977. The study calculated the standardized mean difference effect size and coded possible covariates into three types: study characteristics, student characteristics, and institutional characteristics (Denson, 2009, p. 813). The findings of the meta-analysis showed that, for college students, curricular and cocurricular diversity activities have an overall positive effect on reducing racial bias. The study also found preliminary evidence suggesting that certain sources may moderate these effects, such as racial composition of the sample, pedagogical approach, or publication type.

### **Other Views**

Sparks and Ledgerwood (2017), while not specifically discussing racial bias, looked at the effects of framing information in positive or negative ways on the shaping of people’s attitudes using five separate studies, which were presented in

either the loss domain (participants are presented with information that shows a potential loss) or the gain domain (participants are presented with information that shows a potential gain). In the first study, participants were presented with information from the gain domain, framed in either a positive or a negative way the first time, and then presented again, framed in the opposite way. The same was done with information from the loss domain. The second study was identical to the first, except that only the gain domain was examined. Study three replicated study one, with the addition of a familiarity component. Half of the participants were presented with the information along with an additional explanation of how it was similar to previous tasks, while the other half were presented with the information in a way that it would seem completely new. Studies four and five built on study three. In study four, familiarity was established for half of the participants giving them direct experience with the task. In study five, familiar language was used versus technical, unfamiliar language. Participants' attitudes were ascertained by asking participants to rate their feelings on the information presented after each framing.

Through a meta-analysis, the study found that, in the gain domain, positive attitudes tend to endure through later negative framing, as long as the information presented was new and unfamiliar. However, in the loss domain, negative framing is more enduring, regardless of their familiarity with the situation. In the context of racial bias, this shows that, with a loss mentality, people are more likely to hold on to

their negative racial biases even when presented with positive information, but may be receptive to positive framing if the information is new and they can see possible gains from acquiring it.

Finally, Dee and Penner (2016) contended that the racial achievement gap is large and persistent, and they measured the causal effects of an ethnic studies course (a form of culturally relevant pedagogy) on the achievement of students of color as a means of reducing that gap. The researchers used data from five cohorts in three high schools in the San Francisco Unified School District, which piloted a year-long ethnic studies curriculum for ninth-grade students. The ES course was required for those who exhibited early indicators of being at risk for high school failure and recommended for those whose eighth-grade GPA was below 2.0. Students in the study were 60 percent Asian, 23 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent black. Additionally, 18 percent of the students were English Language Learner students, 12 percent were categorized as special education students, and 42 percent were female. The researchers analyzed three dependent variables occurring in participants' ninth-grade year: attendance rates, GPA, and credits earned (Dee & Penner, 2016, p. 13). The researchers used a regression discontinuity (RD) design, which can provide causal inferences and "asks whether, conditional on a students' eighth-grade GPA, student outcomes 'jump' at the threshold that defined treatment eligibility," to compare those who were eligible for assignment to the ES class (eighth-grade GPA

below 2.0) to those who were ineligible (eighth-grade GPA at or above 2.0) (Dee & Penner, 2016, p. 14).

Students in the study showed significant improvements for students at the 2.0 threshold in the three academic outcomes measured: attendance rose by 5.6 percent, GPA increased by 0.39 points, and students earned 6.3 more credits overall (p. 17). These results indicate that taking the ES course increased attendance by 21 percent, increased GPA by 1.4 grade points, and increased credits earned by 23 credits (p. 18). These results indicate that the ethnic studies curriculum offered to ninth-grade students in SFUSD led to increased overall performance of students of color in the ninth grade and reduced the probability of those students dropping out. The study fills in the gap in the literature providing empirical evidence to show the benefits of a culturally relevant curriculum for students of color. While the current study is looking at the effects of ethnic studies on white students' racial attitudes, this study demonstrates the value of an ethnic studies course for students of color. Since the current study is looking at the value for all students in its effects on the racial biases of white students, it adds to the demonstrated value overall.

### **Conclusion**

While the available literature does not provide a comprehensive picture on the topic, it does suggest that inclusion of multicultural or diversity coursework does have a positive effect on the reduction of racial bias. It shows that recognizing

white privilege and ingrained racism is an important first step in the unlearning process. After all, one cannot fix something they do not know exists. However, it should not be the focus when educating whites on diversity. Instead, education should be focused on white supremacy, the meaning of whiteness, and the historical background and continued existence of oppression. Taking a diversity-focused course, especially when combined with contact with people of other races, and positive framing, show promise toward reducing bias in white students and shows a positive impact on students of color. This research provides a basis for the current study and demonstrates the need for further and more in-depth study in this area. For this study's purposes, it provides sufficient background information on white privilege and some information on its effects and methods of unlearning.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The power structure that enforces racial oppression has been in place since the founding of this country, and some of the greatest perpetrators of the power structure are unsuspecting white people who do not even realize that they have been indoctrinated to believe that people of other races are inferior and that they perpetuate oppression. I think that one possible way to break that cycle is to enlighten young white people about the realities of power and oppression so they do not carry it with them into their eventual places in society, some of which will be positions of power. Because of that, my research is focused on investigating whether white students who learn in an equitable environment with a culturally relevant curriculum have fewer biases and ingrained racist attitudes than those in traditional Eurocentric environments and, ultimately, whether that can help improve the learning environment and outcomes for students of color. To investigate this, I asked the questions, how does a multicultural curriculum affect white students' understanding of white privilege and racial bias, does it reduce explicit and implicit bias, and does a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias motivate

white students to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color? I hypothesized that white students will develop a keener understanding of their own privilege and a greater sensitivity to racial issues and reduction of racial bias after exposure to the histories and struggles of people of other races/ethnicities in their school curriculum, and that this will encourage them to be more aware of their own behaviors and adjust them to be more respectful and inclusive of students of color. My research provides preliminary empirical evidence on whether that is actually a possibility, and further research can be conducted regarding the outcomes of students of color given this information, the outcomes of white students in a diverse community, the social effects of such curricula, and other areas.

### **Research Design**

I used a mixed-methods design of qualitative and quantitative measures in a case study research design. This design using multiple types of collection instruments is intended to capture different aspects of participants' responses. The questionnaire is written and records self-reported attitudes, the IAT is computerized and measures implicit attitudes, the interviews are spoken and record self-reported attitudes as well as body language and other nonverbal communications. The use of these multiple tools to assess student attitudes from multiple perspectives using multiple senses, which have been analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively,

allowed me to triangulate the results to those that are in agreement with each other, which provides a more accurate picture of what is measured.

### **Participants**

This study is a preliminary case study consisting of only one participant. As such, results are not meant to be generalizable but only to be used as a basis for further study. The participant in this study is a white, female, 18-year-old college student attending San Francisco State University.

Recruitment for participants included posting flyers around campus at San Francisco State University in residential buildings, academic buildings, and student services and recreational buildings; delivering a recruitment message to Ethnic Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies in Education professors for distribution to students via email; and presenting in select classrooms to recruit participants.

### **Procedure**

Before commencing the experiment, the participant read and signed an informed consent form, which detailed all procedures to be performed in the study. After consent was established, the participant took the computerized Race Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure students' implicit bias toward black people. Following administration of the IAT, the participant was given a 28-question survey to measure racial and white privilege attitudes, followed by an interview to ascertain student attitudes on the value of ethnic studies, and the participant's understanding

of white privilege. The same procedures were administered on campus at San Francisco State University at both the beginning and at the end of the Fall 2017 semester. The first set of assessments was administered after three class meetings, under the assumption that the participant would not have received adequate exposure to the material after three meetings of a 30-meeting course. The last set of assessments was completed in week 12 of 16 of the course, under the assumption that the participant would have received adequate exposure to the material by that point in time. For the purposes of this study, understanding white privilege is operationally defined as scoring higher than 75 percent on the WPAS, and racial bias is operationally defined as a demonstration of automatic bias for white people over black people on the Race IAT.

**Race IAT.** The Race IAT measures how closely a person associates the concepts of black or white people with good or bad evaluations. I chose this tool because it has been a well-trusted tool for measuring implicit bias for nearly 20 years, and studies have shown that it has strong markers of both validity and reliability (Rezaei, 2011).

To complete the task, the participant is asked to sort, as quickly as possible, words into the categories of “Good” and “Bad” and pictures into the categories of “African Americans” and “European Americans” by pressing either the E or I key on their keyboard. The test is administered in seven parts. In the first part, the

participant is shown pictures of African American and European American faces and asked to press the E or I key to categorize the photos into the categories, "European Americans" and "African Americans." In the second part, the participant is asked to categorize words by pressing the E or I key to categorize them as "Bad" or "Good." The third and fourth parts are identical, and the participant is asked to sort both photos and words into the above categories. While it may change for each administration, the participant uses either the E or I key to categorize the words and phrases into the categories of "African Americans"/"Good" and "European Americans"/"Bad," or the E or I key to sort the words and phrases into the categories of "African Americans"/"Bad" and "European Americans"/"Good."

In the second half of the administration, the concepts associated with the E and I keys switch. So, in part five, the participant is again shown pictures of African American and European American faces and asked to press the E or I key to categorize the photos into the categories, "European Americans" and "African Americans," but the categories associated with the E and I keys are the reverse of what they were in the first part of the administration. The sixth and seventh parts are again identical and the adverse of the third and fourth parts.

The IAT is scored by measuring the response time in each part and comparing the response times between the third/fourth parts and the sixth/seventh parts. If the participant is faster in responding when African Americans and Bad are

associated with the same key, and European Americans and Good are associated with the same key, than when the reverse is true, they would be deemed to have an implicit bias toward European Americans. The length of the difference in time responding further characterizes bias into slight, moderate, strong, or no preference. Both administrations of the IAT were administered to the participant via the Project Implicit website at [Implicit.Harvard.edu](http://Implicit.Harvard.edu).

**White Privilege Attitudes Scale.** The survey administered in this study was the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (WPAS), a 28-question survey measuring racial and white privilege attitudes (Pinterits et al., 2009). I chose this questionnaire because it was developed to measure the complexity of attitudes around white privilege, to include the affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of white privilege attitudes. It was found, using Cronbach's alpha to have strong reliability. The WPAS is scored on a six-point, Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The overall score on the WPAS corresponds to the level of acknowledgment of white privilege. Higher overall scores indicate a higher level of acknowledgment.

The WPAS is further broken down into four subscales. Subscale 1, "Confronting White Privilege," consists of 12 items, including: "I take action to dismantle white privilege." Higher scores on this subscale indicate a higher willingness to confront white privilege. Subscale 2, "Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege," consists six items, including: "I worry about what giving up some

white privileges might mean for me.” Higher scores on this subscale indicate higher acknowledgement of the consequences of confronting white privilege. Subscale 3, “White Privilege Awareness,” consists of four items, including: “Plenty of people of color are more privileged than Whites.” Higher scores on this subscale indicate deeper understanding of the meaning of white privilege. Subscale 4, “White Privilege Remorse,” consists of six items, including: “I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am White.” Higher scores on this subscale indicate a higher level of remorse over the benefits associated with white privilege.

The WPAS was administered in a paper-based format and scored manually in both administrations of the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

The IAT data was quantitatively analyzed by measuring change in scores between the first and second administrations in order to indicate whether implicit bias increased, decreased, or remained the same over the course of the semester while taking the ethnic studies course. The survey data was quantitatively analyzed by tallying the scores of each survey and its subscales and comparing the results between surveys taken at the beginning of the semester and at the end to measure any changes in answers given in order to indicate growth or regression in understanding of white privilege. The interviews were transcribed and transcripts were qualitatively analyzed for emerging themes, commonalities and other

emergent changes in attitudes or understanding. All three methods were triangulated for an in-depth analysis of common themes answering the research questions. I hypothesized that white students will develop a keener understanding of their own privilege and a greater sensitivity to racial issues and reduction of racial bias after exposure to the histories and struggles of peoples of other races/ethnicities in their school curriculum.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to my study. First, since one of my instruments is analyzed qualitatively (interviews), and all findings on this instrument are based on my own interpretation, my personal bias could affect results. To mitigate this threat, I have attempted to be as objective as possible in my analysis by making sure I understand the vocabulary of the participant and by having my advisor review and evaluate the report. Additionally, the use of three different types of data collection has allowed me to triangulate the results for better accuracy. Also, since I was able to obtain data from only one participant, this study has been limited to a case study presenting preliminary data. It is not generalizable; it is a preliminary study meant to show if there is evidence of increased awareness about privilege and bias in a single white student. A more extensive study is needed to make it generalizable.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

#### Introduction

To investigate whether white students who learn in an equitable environment with a culturally relevant curriculum have fewer biases and ingrained racist attitudes than those in a traditional Eurocentric environment and, ultimately, whether that can help improve the learning environment and outcomes for students of color, I asked the questions, how does a multicultural curriculum affect white students' understanding of white privilege and racial bias, does it reduce explicit and implicit bias, and does a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias motivate white students to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color. I hypothesized that white students will develop a keener understanding of their own privilege and a greater sensitivity to racial issues and reduction of racial bias after exposure to the histories and struggles of peoples of other races/ethnicities in their school curriculum, and that this will encourage them to be more aware of their own behaviors and adjust them to be more respectful and inclusive of students of color. I found my hypothesis to be correct in this case study, which investigated the effects of taking ethnic studies on one

participant. This warrants further, more in-depth study with a wide participant pool to determine if these results are generalizable.

### **Race IAT**

The Race Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures how closely a person associates the concepts of black or white people with good or bad evaluations. To complete the task, the participant is asked to sort, as quickly as possible, words and pictures into categories. The IAT is scored by measuring the response time in each part and comparing the response times between the third/fourth parts and the sixth/seventh parts. The length of the difference in time responding further characterizes bias into slight, moderate, strong, or no preference. The IAT data was quantitatively analyzed by measuring change in scores between the first and second administrations in order to indicate whether implicit bias increased, decreased, or remained the same over the course of the semester while taking the ethnic studies course.

The results of the two administrations of the Race IAT were vastly different and demonstrated an increase in bias between the two administrations. In the first administration of the Race IAT in September of 2017, the participant showed a slight automatic preference for African Americans over European Americans. In the second administration of the Race IAT in November of 2017, the participant

demonstrated a strong automatic preference for European Americans over African Americans.

While the IAT has been a well-trusted tool for measuring implicit bias for nearly 20 years, and studies have shown that it has strong markers of both validity and reliability (Rezaei, 2011), the results are still not perfectly accurate. There is often slight variation in results between multiple administrations of a single participant in the same time period (Nosek et al., 2014). Additionally, when told about their results and asked about their thoughts on why they thought that might have happened during the interview portion of the end-of-semester administration of the instruments, the participant noted that the IAT results discrepancy may have been due to the fact that they were very nervous in the first administration and were extremely careful because of that. Since they suspected that the results would probably show bias toward European Americans and they were self-conscious about that, the participant went slowly and paid careful attention to their selections in the first administration. However, the participant noted that, in the second administration, after having spent some time learning about race and race issues, they were less self-conscious. They felt more comfortable with race the second time around, and, as a result, they did not worry as much about the results and were not as careful with their answers. Because of this, it is likely that the results of the second administration are more reliable than the results of the first administration.

With this knowledge and the known variability of results, it is difficult to ascertain whether these results are reliable, so we must deem the results obtained with this instrument inconclusive. In future study using this instrument, more accurate results may be obtained by repeated testing, either on the same day or across multiple days, and averaging the results.

### **White Privilege Attitudes Scale**

The survey administered in this study was the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (WPAS), a 28-question survey measuring racial and white privilege attitudes (Pinterits et al., 2009). Higher overall scores on the WPAS indicate a higher level of acknowledgment of white privilege. The survey data was quantitatively analyzed by tallying the scores of each survey and its subscales and comparing the results between surveys taken at the beginning of the semester and at the end to measure any changes in answers given in order to indicate growth or regression in understanding of white privilege.

The results showed an increased understanding of white privilege between the two administrations. Since understanding white privilege is operationally defined as scoring higher than 75 percent on the WPAS for the purposes of this study, the participant began the semester with a reasonable understanding of white privilege, coming in just 1 percentage point below the threshold. By the end of the semester, however, the participant had gained a fairly strong understanding of

white privilege, with an 85 percent score. The participant's overall score increased by 13.6 percent, from 125 out of 168 (74 percent) in the first administration in September of 2017 to 142 (85 percent) in the second administration in November of 2017. While certainly not an expert on the subject, the participant demonstrated significant growth after 10 weeks in an ethnic studies course. However, as noted later in Chapter 5 in the discussion of subscale 2, those questions may be problematic, so overall results with those questions omitted are also presented as an alternative. With the subscale 2 questions omitted, the participant's score increased by 16.1 percent, from 112 out of 132 (85 percent) in the first administration in September of 2017 to 130 (98 percent) in the second administration in November of 2017. This shows a more marked increase, from a fairly strong understanding of white privilege to an almost full understanding.

The participant's score on subscale 1, "Confronting White Privilege," increased by 16.67 percent, from 60 out of 72 (83 percent) to 70 (97 percent). This was the most substantial increase the participant showed on any of the subscales or overall on the WPAS. The participant's scores demonstrated an increased willingness to take action to reduce the effects and existence of white privilege, particularly by speaking up when people they know demonstrate white privilege behaviors.

The participant's score on subscale 2, "Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege," decreased by 7.69 percent, from 13 out of 36 (36 percent) to 12 (33 percent). The participant's score on subscale 3, "White Privilege Awareness," increased by 4.35 percent, from 23 out of 24 (96 percent) to 24 (100 percent). The participant's score on subscale 4, "White Privilege Remorse," increased by 24.14 percent, from 29 out of 36 (81 percent) to 36 (100 percent).

### **Interviews**

The interviews were transcribed and transcripts were qualitatively analyzed for emerging themes, commonalities and other emergent changes in attitudes or understanding. Between the first interview in September of 2017 to the second interview in November of 2017, the participant's responses showed greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias and a higher level of comfort in discussing these topics. In the beginning of the semester, the participant noted, on being culturally aware, "I'm culturally open-minded because I know that I'm not fully aware. I know that I don't know how to have these conversations." At the end of the semester, they noted,

I don't think I'm ever going to feel fully aware; things are always changing. But I do feel more aware of people's struggles and of the history behind it and why it is that way. ... Now when my friend makes a joke about reverse racism, I can actively and accurately dismantle that and shut that down and explain

why that's wrong and why that's not a thing and why you shouldn't keep making jokes like that.

Additional concepts that emerged during the interviews were a higher level of self-awareness when discussing white privilege and racial bias, and a higher level of comfort engaging with people of color in general and in being an ally. The participant said that learning about the struggles of and inequity of opportunity for people of color made them more aware of those aspects and their humanity when interacting with people of color, and that "has broken down my bias a bit."

Additionally, the participant expressed trepidation in purchasing a Black Lives Matter shirt because they were not sure if wearing it would be appropriate for a white person. By the end of the semester, they wore their newly purchased Black Lives Matter shirt proudly as an ally, saying, "I know that it's important for me, and it's important for white people in general, to stand together with black people without taking space, of course, but still being there and standing together."

In addition to the participant's responses, in the second interview, they demonstrated a more relaxed attitude in answering questions about race, white privilege, and racial bias than in the first interview. In the beginning, they were clearly uncomfortable, giving careful, short, and broken answers filled with a lot of pauses and "ums." In contrast, their answers in the second interview were given with confidence. The answers were longer and used language with ease,

demonstrating subject knowledge. It was clear that the participant had gained a greater understanding of the concepts of white privilege and racial bias as well as a greater recognition of those things in themselves, and that they had gained a greater level of comfort in discussing them.

### **Overall Results**

All three methods were triangulated for an in-depth analysis of common themes answering the research question. The results of the three instruments showed that the participant's understanding of white privilege in general and the participant's awareness of their own white privilege increased significantly from the first week of taking Introduction to Ethnic Studies to the last month of the course. The participant's understanding of racial bias also showed a marked increase. However, the manifestation of the participant's implicit bias toward African Americans also showed a marked increase from the beginning of the semester to the end. Overall, these results demonstrate that the participant gained a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias, reduced their explicit bias, and demonstrated a motivation to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The concepts of white privilege and racial bias have been in practice in the United States since its founding. However, they have been largely ignored by the dominant culture, only making their way into conversation when the oppressed decide to amass and speak out about it. In the 1960s, we saw the Civil Rights Movement, where black people and other people of color assembled to end racial segregation and discrimination. The idea of white privilege began to gain recognition in the 1980s, and the long-existing concepts began to be widely discussed across America in the past five years. In 2012, after George Zimmerman murdered Trayvon Martin, a black teenage boy, when he thought the young black boy was up to no good in his majority-white community, the nation began to take notice of the prevalence of the unjust killing of black Americans and the subsequent lack of consequences for the murderers, particularly for the killings of black people by police. Following Zimmerman's acquittal in 2013, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter became widely used on social media, which later grew into a social movement against violence and systemic racism against black people. As more and more unjust

killings of black people began to make the news, the conversation and the movement have grown and begun to encompass more mainstream organizations, such as the NFL, where 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick made the conversation all but unavoidable when he began to kneel during the national anthem before football games, and more and more players across various sports have begun to follow suit.

In that time, the white people of the nation have chosen one of three camps: some have fully embraced white supremacy, some have continued to deny the existence of a problem and instead insist that people like Kaepernick have instead invented the problem, while still others have begun to take notice of the problem and recognize the role that white people have played in creating it. The term white privilege, though largely a foreign term to many people just a decade ago, is now part of the American lexicon, and some people wear their recognition of white privilege like a badge of honor. But, as Lensmire et al. (2013) pointed out, that is only the first step. Along with recognizing how we benefit from white privilege, white people also need to use that knowledge to take action toward leveling the playing field. That means learning about what white privilege truly means and the history of and continued inequality and inequity in America. White people need to be able to feel empathy for other ethnic groups in order to truly recognize the effects that white privilege and racial bias have had on marginalized groups. That means learning about their histories and struggles and contributions to society and being

able to recognize their humanity. As Freire (1972) said, “The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love” (pp. 49–50).

This case study aimed to discover whether an education that includes the histories, struggles, and contributions of people of color, as well as the realities of the power structure that created that unnecessary hierarchy has the possibility of serving that purpose. I hypothesized that, by learning in a classroom with a multicultural/social justice curriculum, such as an ethnic studies course, white students will gain a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias, demonstrate a reduction in implicit and explicit biases, be able to better recognize those things in their own actions and behaviors, and use that knowledge to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color. The quantitative and qualitative results from the single participant, while not totally uniform, suggest that they will, and further study in this area is imperative to gain more accurate and generalizable results.

### **Issues With the White Privilege Attitudes Scale**

The participant’s score on subscale 2, “Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege,” decreased by 7.69 percent. Though this was a decrease in score that

negatively affected the overall score, it does not necessarily demonstrate a lack of understanding of white privilege. This section consists of six items, including: "I worry about what giving up some white privileges might mean for me," which supposedly indicate higher acknowledgement of the consequences of confronting white privilege. However, anticipating and acknowledging costs do not have the same effect for every white person confronting white privilege.

Some white people worry so much about the costs of confronting white privilege that they choose to ignore it. This person would score highly in this section, but perhaps not fully grasp the meaning and ramifications of white privilege for others. Some white people may realize that there are costs to confronting white privilege, but not be concerned about the costs to themselves over doing the right thing. This person would likely get a low score in this section, since the items are worded to ascertain how the person feels about these things rather than a simple acknowledgement. For example, this person might enter a score of one for the item, "I am worried that taking action against white privilege will hurt my relationships with other Whites," because, while they may acknowledge that taking action against white privilege might hurt their relationships with other whites, that may not be something that actually worries them. Finally, some people, including the participant in this study, do not anticipate many costs to confronting white privilege because they are surrounded by people who support the confrontation of white privilege.

Additionally, the participant noted, "I've never had to deal with my community—my close community—being against my views. My family has always been very supportive of whatever I'm doing, and same with my friends and family." While they did not feel worried about ostracizing friends or family members over confronting white privilege, they noted that was something that may encourage them to take further action rather than preventing them from it.

The participant's score on subscale 4, "White Privilege Remorse," increased by 24.14 percent. This subscale consists of six items, including: "I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am White." Higher scores on this subscale indicate a higher level of remorse over the benefits associated with white privilege. The participant began the semester with a fairly high level of remorse about their white privilege and ended with very strong feelings of remorse. According to the WPAS, this would indicate a stronger acknowledgement of white privilege. While this may very well be true, some would argue that guilt is often used as a shield or an impediment to action. Shelby Steele, in her 1990 essay on white guilt, described it thusly:

It can lead us to put our own need for innocence above our concern for the problem that made us feel guilt in the first place. But this fear for the self does not only inspire selfishness; it also becomes a pressure to escape the guilt-inducing situation. When selfishness and escapism are at work, we are no longer interested in the source of our guilt and, therefore, no longer

concerned with an authentic redemption from it. Then we only want the look of redemption, the gesture of concern that will give us the appearance of innocence and escape from the situation. (p. 502)

Similarly, Audre Lorde wrote, "Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures" (1984, p. 124). The feeling of guilt does not necessarily press a person to action. Sometimes, as Lorde suggested, it can actually serve as a hindrance to action. Sometimes the feeling of guilt can actually be paralyzing. Other times, it does encourage a person to action—to take action to alleviate the feeling of guilt. As Steele elucidated, the feeling of guilt will make a person uncomfortable to the extent that they will do just enough not to feel that way anymore. This does not necessarily mean that they will take steps to rectify the situation that caused them to feel guilty in the first place, but that they will try to make amends enough to alleviate their guilt. In the case of white privilege, that may mean taking steps to dismantle white privilege, but it could just as likely mean simply making apologies for the fact that they are benefiting from white privilege. While, at best, the latter is meaningless without true action, it could actually cause further harm. If a white person literally apologizes to a person of color for their privilege without doing anything about it, it not only perpetuates the problem, but it places the onus on that person of color to alleviate the white person's guilt, thus increasing rather than decreasing the impact of white privilege on that

person and their community. Further, as Lensmire et al. (2013) note in "Mary's Story," people like John may push back against the idea of white privilege if they feel like it is supposed to make them feel guilty for being white, or make them feel like the "bad guy."

With that said, it is important to note that I have not elected to tally an alternative overall score with this subtest omitted, as I did with subtest 2. I chose not to do that because half of the questions are worded in a way that would suggest that a positive answer is actually an acknowledgement of white privilege and a driving force toward meaningful action, such as, "I am angry that I keep benefiting from white privilege." The other half use the words "guilt" and "ashamed": "I am ashamed of my white privilege," "White people should feel guilty about having white privilege." These items are worded in a way that it is difficult to know whether a positive answer fits the above description of guilt, or whether it means the participant is spurred to action by guilt. When asked later to expound on their answers to these questions, the participant indicated that they fall in the latter camp, saying, "I strongly believe that nobody should be ashamed of what privileges they have. We're ashamed that society has made those privileges. But I'm not ashamed of my own privilege because I can use it to my advantage to help others." Because of that and the fact that these three items have a minimal impact on overall score, I chose not to omit them for an alternative overall score.

## **Overall Results and Conclusions**

Consistent with the existing literature, the overall results of the study show that taking ethnic studies has a positive impact on students' biases and understanding of white privilege. The findings of the three instruments showed that the participant's understanding of white privilege in general and the participant's awareness of their own white privilege increased significantly from the first week of taking Introduction to Ethnic Studies to the last month of the course. The participant's understanding of racial bias also showed a marked increase. However, the results of the Implicit Association Test were determined to be inconclusive, so there is no accurate measure of implicit bias in this study. Overall, and consistent with my hypothesis, the participant gained a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias, articulated a self-reported reduction in implicit and explicit biases, was able to better recognize those things in their own actions and behaviors, and demonstrated a willingness to use that knowledge to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color. Inconsistent with my hypothesis, the participant did not demonstrate a reduction in implicit bias, since the IAT results were inconclusive.

## **Recommendations**

**Implementation.** The results of this study indicate that a Eurocentric teaching model has a detrimental effect on students living and learning in a diverse

nation. It is ineffective both for members of marginalized groups and for members of the dominant group in preparing them to be cooperative members of a diverse society and in developing their abilities to change rather than perpetuate systems of oppression. "Ultimately, for persons in complex multicultural societies, growth into maturity involves coming to terms with the diversity of voices and cultures within" (Erickson, 2010, p. 52). To remedy this issue, we need to change and/or improve upon the current model by implementing a more equitable and accurate curriculum, improving teacher education and retention, and enacting methods to improve teacher diversity.

White students who matriculate in majority white schools, never having discussions about the reality of oppression and power in this country, move into adulthood with the deep-seated racist attitudes that grow from that ignorance. From there, they either carry those attitudes into their everyday interactions and decisions as they enter the workforce, or realize that the reality they encounter in adulthood is disparate from what they learned (or did not learn) in school and are then tasked with the major undertaking of educating themselves about other cultures and their struggles and unlearning the racist attitudes and ideas that have been fostered throughout their youths.

To ameliorate this effect, teachers need to be properly educated to be able to design their own equitable curricula. Teachers should be trained to incorporate

culturally relevant material and practices in the classroom and to recognize, as Cochran-Smith (2000) puts it, that “European perspectives are not universal standards of the evolution of higher order thought, but culturally and historically constructed habits of mind” (p. 177). Additionally, it is important to learn about the effects of the power structure in the United States, and that “the standard ‘neutral’ U.S. school and its curriculum have been generated out of, and help to sustain, unearned advantages and disadvantages for particular groups of students based on race, class, culture, gender, linguistic background, and ability/disability” (Cochran-Smith, 2000, p. 177), in order for them to recognize and reimagine their roles in upholding and/or disrupting that structure to create a more equitable classroom.

Additionally, conversations about race and oppression need to be had in schools, and a strong emphasis should be placed on teacher education and development. Within that, a particular focus should be placed on how to have these conversations with students, and teacher development workshops should be included that place a focus on working together to awaken to “white supremacist consciousness,” a process which Barlas et al. (2000) describe as “becoming aware that white norms of thinking and behaving exist, that they are only one among many cultural constructions for human beingness, and that ‘color-blindness’ from the summit of white privilege perpetuates racism and systems of domination” (p. 1). It is important to note, however, that these conversations should take place in

addition to learning about other cultures and their histories. It is detrimental to frame an entire culture around oppression. For example, teaching only about slavery and Jim Crow when talking about African American culture has a deleterious effect on the positive contributions and rich history of the people.

Further, while multicultural education and rich conversation should be interwoven throughout the curriculum through students' entire educations, an ethnic studies program should also be implemented. Ethnic studies courses give students the opportunity to delve deeply into the rich histories, accomplishments, and contributions to U.S. and world history of various ethnic groups. Ethnic studies courses should be offered starting in middle school as both electives and required courses, and should cover a variety of topics dealing with a variety of ethnic groups. Teachers in this program should come from an ethnic studies background and should ideally be teachers of color. A diversity or ethnic studies requirement should also be part of the graduation requirements in all colleges, similar to the school in which Chang (2002) conducted his study.

Students also need to be provided with textbooks that allow for various learning styles and present an accurate and inclusive view of history. When selecting textbooks, these questions should be considered:

- How many perspectives are represented?
- Does the text focus on the accomplishments of one group or many?

- Are the experiences of any group marginalized or absent?
- Does the narrative focus on the experiences of multiple groups, or is it centered on one group's experience?
- Is there a solid representation of different races, ethnicities, religions, classes, abilities, and genders in the text?
- Does the text focus on one learning style or many?
- Does the text offer alternative methods for completing the problem/experiment?

Finally, many students in America learn in similar situations to my own— with little to no diversity in the classroom or teacher population. To remedy the lack of exposure to the diversity of our nation, the first step is to work toward diversifying the teaching population that is 82 percent white (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2016, p. 6). “The significance of teacher race is usually framed in terms of the degree to which a white teaching force is appropriate for students of color” (Sleeter, 1993, p. 157), but it is also significant in terms of the importance for students to see people of color in roles of authority. This flips the existing power structure on its head as white students see a person of color having power over them.

**Further study.** The participant in this case study disclosed that they came from a progressive family, so, though they grew up in an area with little racial

diversity (mostly white), they had some exposure to the ideas of white privilege and racial bias. They also expressed an eagerness to learn about other cultures and their struggles and grow as an ally by taking the Introduction to Ethnic Studies course. Additionally, they were self-selected, as the class was an elective. It is likely that many white students in ethnic studies classes share a similar preexisting knowledge and eagerness to learn, making them more likely to take something away from the class. Further study using participants who are taking ethnic studies as a requirement, similar to Chang's (2002) study, or who are attending schools that use an overall multicultural/social justice curriculum would yield richer results. Using participants from diverse political, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds would also provide a better picture. Additionally, conducting further studies in various areas of the country, including those lacking in diversity like areas of the Midwest, extreme Northeast, and Northwest, would give a better picture of how much exposure affects results.

As previously noted, unlearning bias and reconciling white privilege is an ongoing process. Further study would also be useful in looking at the effects of using a multicultural/culturally relevant/ethnic studies curriculum over time. Information about whether continued education in this area is beneficial, and whether white bias reduces more over time after taking an ethnic studies course versus natural maturity and growth, or lack thereof. Additionally, study is needed to show the

effects of being exposed to these curricula at a young enough age so that it is simply learning rather than unlearning. This field of study should look at whether white students matriculating in this environment harbor the same biases as those in traditional Eurocentric environments, as well as whether students of color learning with them demonstrate better learning outcomes and feelings of belonging versus those learning in traditional Eurocentric environments.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this case study coincide with my own personal experience, suggesting that a multicultural/social justice-focused education may, in fact, help white students become more aware of their white privilege and actually unlearn racial bias. In my experience, an exposure to literature and subjects by and about people of color, focusing on their own achievements and experiences, was the undeniable catalyst to my ongoing awakening. Similarly, the participant in this case study demonstrated marked growth in these areas after just one semester in an ethnic studies course. I am certain that every white person in America would not yield the same results, though. Recent events in America have demonstrated that there are still a good number of active white supremacist extremists who are unlikely to change their minds under any circumstances. However, I truly believe that there are enough good-intentioned and unintentional racists out there that an education that fosters an understanding of white privilege and racial bias can make

a huge difference in disrupting the status quo. This case study demonstrated that a multicultural curriculum increased one white students' understanding of white privilege and racial bias and reduced explicit bias, and that a greater understanding of white privilege and racial bias motivated this white student to change their behaviors in order to be more accepting and inclusive of students of color. This information suggests that further, more in-depth study in this area promises to show similar results. And if, as a result, ethnic studies becomes a requirement in colleges and even high schools across the nation, there is hope that a mass unlearning could occur, and a shift in the power structure could happen, resulting in true liberty and justice for all.

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## APPENDIX A

**White Privilege Attitudes Scale: Items, Scoring Key and Subscale Summaries**

Directions. Below is a set of descriptions of different attitudes about white privilege in the United States. Using the 6-point scale, please rate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement. Please be as open and honest as you can; there are no right or wrong answers. Record your response to the left of each item. Please answer all items.

		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>					<b>Strongly Agree</b>	
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	
<b>1</b>	I plan to work to change our unfair social structure that promotes white privilege.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
<b>2</b>	Our social structure system promotes white privilege.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
<b>3</b>	I am angry that I keep benefiting from white privilege.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
<b>4</b>	I am worried that taking action against white privilege will hurt my relationships with other Whites.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
<b>5</b>	I take action against white privilege with people I know.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
<b>6</b>	Everyone has equal opportunity, so this so-called white privilege is really White-	<input type="checkbox"/>						





The items in bold are reverse scored (i.e., 6 = 1, 5 = 2, 4 = 3, 3 = 4, 2 = 5, 1 = 6): items 6, 10, 16 and 24. Higher scores correspond with higher levels of acknowledgment of White privilege.

Subscale 1: 'Confronting White Privilege' consists of the following 12 items: 1, 5, 7, 10r, 12, 14, 16r, 18, 20, 23, 26 and 28

Subscale 2: 'Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege' consists of the following 6 items: 4, 9, 13, 17, 22 and 27

Subscale 3: 'White Privilege Awareness' consists of the following 4 items: 2, 6r, 19 and 24r

Subscale 4: 'White Privilege Remorse' consists of the following 6 items: 3, 8, 11, 15, 21 and 25 89

## APPENDIX B

### Pre-Semester Interview Questions

1. What has been your exposure to the histories and struggles of people of other races/ethnicities so far?
2. Would you say that you are culturally aware? What does that mean to you?
3. Describe your understanding of white privilege and how you think it has or has not affected your life.
4. Describe the role you think bias plays in interracial interactions (yours and/or others').
5. What role do you think the education system and/or other institutions had on shaping your racial views and those of other students?
6. Do you think ethnic studies is valuable and/or relevant to you? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX C

### **Post-Semester Interview Questions**

1. Did you find the class to be valuable and/or relevant to you?
2. Did you learn more than you expected to?
3. How was the experience of learning about other races/ethnicities and cultures for you?
4. What was your biggest takeaway from the class?
5. Do you feel like what you've learned will affect your interactions with and feelings toward people of different races/ethnicities moving forward?